

THE BENEFICIAL INFLUENCE OF
LITERARY AND SCIENTIFIC INSTITUTIONS.

THE
ANNUAL ORATION
BEFORE THE
ALUMNI OF JEFFERSON COLLEGE,
CANONSBURG, PA.

DELIVERED SEPTEMBER 23, 1835;

The evening before the Annual Commencement.

BY
JAMES VEECH, A. M.
OF PITTSBURGH.



PITTSBURGH:
MATTHEW MACLEAN, PRINTER.

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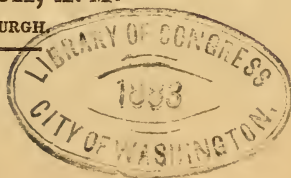
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JEFFERSON COLLEGE, Pa., Sept. 23, 1835.

Extract from the Minutes of 'The Alumni Association, &c.'

"RESOLVED, That our most grateful acknowledgments are due to our fellow Alumnus, *James Veech, Esq.*, for his truly interesting and eloquent Oration, to which we have this evening listened; and that he be requested to furnish a copy for publication."

Attest.

M. JACOBS, Sec'y.

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ANNUAL ORATION.

My Fellow Alumni :—

THE influence of time and place upon the mind is acknowledged and felt by both the savage and the scholar. It forms one of the simplest and most indissoluble ties between man and the material world around him. It imparts to rocks and trees, to ivy-covered columns and grass-grown paths, the functions of animated being. By the charm which it spreads, the untutored Indian sees the manly form of his slaughtered chief rise from the ashes of the extinguished council fire, and the man of refinement holds converse with absent friends as he gazes upon some relic, enters the mansion where they dwelt, or the hall where they were wont to exchange their greetings. Its existence and its exercise are independent of the discoveries of science and beyond the control of philosophic rules. It displays itself in the communication of pleasure and of pain; and bears upon the soul with its resistless tides of joys, or of sorrows, alike regardless whether sought or shunned. And when its force is spent,—when the emotions which it raises have subsided, it diffuses a benignant serenity over the whole man, like the spray of a broken wave upon the rock against which it beat.

These reflections require no labored application to our present circumstances. Our wandering feet again tread the halls of our venerated *alma mater*. Scenes and movements now arrest our attention which are key-notes to a harmony of the most fondly cherished recollections. We have gathered to our literary home, at this its festival season, not in the spirit which incites to a pilgrimage to Mecca, nor yet like Æneas and his followers at the Court of Dido, to reveal an unexpected deliverance from the tempest and wreck of worldly strife; but we have gathered, in the spirit of generous sons, to mingle our congratulations that that home still flourishes, and to commune upon subjects which concern our lineage and our high born destinies.

The stated time for the meetings of our association is well ordered. It is the eve of an anniversary which commemorates an important epoch in our lives. The interesting exercises we have already witnessed, and which we expect to witness on to-morrow, recall the day which separated us from the objects and pursuits which now pass in review before us. It was a day towards which we had long looked with anxiety and with eagerness. And yet when it came it required a sacrifice which cost us some pain. Tender ties were to be sundered never to be re-united. Perhaps we may all truly say—"Some natural tears we dropt,"—but, if we did, we

"————— wiped them soon;—

"The world was all before us, where to choose

"Our place of rest, and Providence our guide."

And when the restraints, under which we had become impatient, were removed, we bounded forth under the impulse of high hopes and glowing anticipations. The world was then to us a *terra incognita*. Our imaginations

had robed it in classic beauty. Beyond the horizon, which bounded our view, we fancied Arcadian groves and Elysian fields, with no dragons to alarm nor giants to destroy. We began our journey upon the highway of life supposing that it passed through fruitful vales, and that bowers of ease and honor bordered its gratefully winding course to the temple of Fame. Our first few steps were light and fleet. They were guided by that spirit of poetry which is the ascendant star in the morning of life, and which sheds an illusive splendor over every scene. The songs of the syrens that played around us allayed every rising doubt. We slept securely under the coverings which their witcheries wove,—until some rude attack broke the charm;—we awoke;—and saw that the prospect had “lost gay Fancy’s sunny tints, and was clouded o’er by Truth.” We stood bewildered amid the cold realities of existence, where

“The heart is chilled, ————

“While every pulse throbs at the memory

“Of that which has been.”

Instead of meeting with that generosity of feeling and frankness of expression, with which alone we had here been familiar, and from which, in the guilelessness of youth, we had framed the models of mankind, we soon felt that we had to contend with selfish purposes, bursting from their concealments only to ensnare and destroy. Separated from the friends whose counsel and confidence we here shared, we sought relief from those who stood around wearing the outward ceremonials of friendship. But we, too often, found their souls as impenetrable as the middle plate of Achilles’ shield, and perhaps for the same reason—because *gold* interposed. In our despair we grasped the phantoms of our youthful creations, which haunted the ruins of our hopes;—they vanished;—and at last we found ourselves obliged, through much toil and many goading disappointments, to reach the goals of our ambition, or ingloriously relinquish the prizes of the contest.

Having escaped from the arena of worldly commotion, and shaken off the dust—“*pulverem Olympicum*”—which is there thrown upon us, it is pleasing, in this calm retreat of the mind, by the mellow light which memory sheds, to take a retrospective glance at the decayed pictures which our untaught fancies sketched. We live over again the most happy years of our existence. The ardor of youth returns, and with it the innocent gait and friendly emulations of a college life. We sit in a light which throws an obscurity over the bustling scenes through which we have passed; and with a gust, which none but such as we can feel, we exclaim

“————— Hoc est

“Vivere bis, vita posse priore frui.”

But, besides the familiar scenes and events which we have the pleasure here to contemplate, we are happy also to meet with many once familiar faces. We see around us, arrayed in the dignity of age and wisdom, those venerable fathers, the guardians of this repository of learning and usefulness. We meet also some, perhaps a majority, of the honored professors who guided us to the wells of science and truth, who rolled away the stones from their mouths, and from whose ready hands we took the cups full of instruction. They welcome us on our return, as cordially as they blessed us at our departure;—and long may they live to instruct and bless the hundreds of ingenuous youth, who will continue to crowd these halls. But there are others of them whom we see not. Some have gone to engage in

other useful labors. But there is one,* the beloved by all, the beloved of heaven, who has "to the grave gone down," full of years, and full of the honors which unostentatious wisdom and virtue bestow. He that speaks of him need not be reminded of that first law of eulogy—"de mortuis nil nisi bonum,"—for none who knew him, can name him, but to praise.

Our absent classmates,—our companions along the paths of literature, and fellow-laborers up the steep of science,—where are they?—Many of them are moving steadily and successfully along the ways of honor and usefulness in our own and in foreign lands. But as many, alas! have sunk into the "oblivious pool of indolence," quenched their ambition, and engulfed all the hopes of their friends and their country. Although they may still survive, they are but as the masts of the sunken wreck, melancholy warnings to all who aspire after eminence, of the insufficiency of mere academic acquirements to attain it. Others who sat out with us from these peaceful shades, blooming with health, flushed with honors and buoyant with expectation, have terminated their career of promise by a premature arrival at "that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveler returns."—Ever green be their memories, as the grass upon their graves.

A train of reflections like these rises unbidden, but not unwelcome, out of the reminiscences of departed days which are here called up from their long slumber. They are tempting entertainments in which we could indulge with pleasure, and not without profit, to an undefined extent. But we are admonished to forbid their further intrusion, by other subjects which present themselves and claim our dispassionate consideration.

From the thronging themes of thought, which the occasion introduces, it is difficult to select any one of sufficient prominence to exclude all others. I have sought one sufficiently comprehensive to embrace several topics of secondary importance, and therefore ask your attention to *the beneficial influence of literary and scientific institutions*. I have ventured into this expanded field, not because of a presumed ability to traverse it and explore its treasures, but because of its relations to the character and objects of our association.

Corporate institutions for the promotion of literature and science were unknown to the entire ancient world. Perhaps this fact, more than any other, is a just ground for our admiration of the advances in learning made by a few of the ancient nations. But it may also serve as a guide in our estimates of how much higher would have been their attainments had they enjoyed the advantages which such institutions confer. The gloomy abodes of the priests of a degrading idolatry were the nurseries of the infant arts in Egypt. A few, especially geometry, which was rendered necessary to renew the land-marks effaced by the annual overflowings of the Nile, were forced into the stature, but not the strength of manhood. In Greece they were nurtured, like plants in a shade, in the halls and groves of her philosophers. Rome, particularly in the wane of her imperial glory, had her schools; but they were destitute of endowments, and were conducted by separate instructors, with but limited acquirements and little influence. The Romans had gained a knowledge of the *power* of corporate bodies, but seem never to

* No alumnus of Jefferson College will require a Note to inform him that this inadequate tribute belongs to the memory of *Samuel Miller*, A. M., who, from the foundation of the College, in 1802, until near his death, which occurred in 1832, filled the Professorship of Mathematics, Natural Philosophy, &c., with an ability, punctuality and urbanity, which won for him the honor and love of every student.

have conceived the idea of its applicability to any higher purpose than the mechanic arts and the pursuits of gain.

It was reserved for modern times to institute, sustain and enjoy, the benefits of public seminaries of learning. One of the grand causes, subordinate to the revival of letters, which led to the gradual, but thorough, improvement of civil society in the 15th and 16th centuries, was the municipal corporations of Italy: And the erection of corporate bodies, for the cultivation of science and the arts, was but bringing a known moral power, derived from government, to aid in the development of intellectual energies. Although perhaps a few nominal Universities did exist on the continent of Europe and in the isles of Great Britain, prior to the reformation, yet they ill deserved the name. They were little else than nurseries of superstition, well adapted by monkish assiduity for its growth, and for the attenuation of the chimeras of the schools. We are justified in saying that the numerous foundations of Universities, Colleges and Royal Academies in Europe, and the general illumination which succeeded the removal of the heavy cloud of feudal ignorance, were causes and consequences of each other. The proud sons of those ruthless ravagers of all that was useful and great among the ancient nations, set themselves vigorously to repair the ruin which indiscriminating barbarism had wrought. Well endowed seminaries of learning very soon became incorporated with the very vitals of society, in almost every nation where the feudal system prevailed. Aristotle and Homer rose from the dust of ages to occupy that station in the public esteem which had been awarded exclusively to Alaric the Goth, and Attila the Conqueror. The human mind every where stood erect and firm like a giant refreshed by sleep. Galileo and Kepler and Leyden and Newton in the natural field, and Boyle and Bacon and Sidney and Locke, in the moral, crowned themselves with laurels which will never fade while the earth and stars and governments and mind endure.

In our own highly favored country, corporate institutions for the acquisition and advancement of literature and science are almost coeval with its settlement by civilized communities. The pilgrims of Plymouth made the establishment of a University, now the pride of New England, among the objects of their earliest solicitude. Long before our glorious Revolution had public seminaries of learning been founded upon the virgin soil of many of the colonies. And wherever they have been instituted, and generously sustained, they have been nurseries of the richest social benefits, and the central sources of all those radiant streams of knowledge and benevolence which now illumine and ennoble our continent from the Atlantic to the Mississippi.

The College, whose titular honors we wear, was brought into being while yet civilized society was young in this Western Country; and she has "grown with its growth, and strengthened with its strength," until now her numerous "jewels" shine on the pinnacles of professional and public life in almost every State in the Union, and are diffusing the treasures of knowledge, and lighting up the dark haunts of barbarism and idolatry, on every continent and in every clime. But long before this institution was incorporated, and even before our national independence was achieved,* this vil-

* This is strictly true. In the year 1781 a Latin School began to be taught in a log cabin, in Canonsburg, by the afterwards illustrious Lawyer and Statesman of the West, —James Ross, Esq.,—under the patronage of an eminent Father in the Church, the late Rev. Dr. John M'Millan. This was the first classical school West of the mountains.

lage was honored in being the site of a school for the study of the ancient languages. Heroic hexameters were here sung almost in the hearing of the war whoop of the savage; and while civilization was trembling for its existence, the devoted student would soothe his fears with

“*Tityre tu patulæ recubans sub tegmine fagi.*”

Added to the testimony of history, in favor of the salutary influence of incorporated seminaries of learning, is that of our own observation. Who has not observed the fact, however he may have accounted for it, that all who reside in their vicinity, whose souls are not petrified by ignorance and polluted by vice, are characterized by more than an ordinary degree of moral and intellectual refinement? Their minds receive their hue and shape by habitual contact with the learned men and literary and scientific pursuits which daily obtrude upon their attention. By their unavoidable observation of the transformation of character which mental cultivation works, they are stimulated to submit themselves, in some measure, to the transforming influence. An atmosphere of thought is formed, and all who breathe it, certainly, and not imperceptibly, have their affections and mental powers purified and strengthened. A spirit is diffused over surrounding society, which, like the gravitation of the spheres, binds and regulates the movements of mind within its range. In monarchies there is a tendency in the public character to assimilate to the manners and pursuits of the courts and dignitaries of the empire, and unless the salutary influence of literary and scientific bodies be interposed to check and redeem, the results are a corruption of manners and frivolity of thought, which are the presage and the manifestation of social degeneracy. But in republics there are no courtly powers but those which are upheld by intellectual superiority,—no dignitaries but the wise and the good. To these, and to these alone, is it given, to cause the rays of science and the genial warmth of virtue to be infused into, and reflected from, surrounding society, faintly or fervidly, in proportion to the intensity of the radiating body. It was so at Athens. It was so at Florence, in the age of the Medici; and it is pre-eminently so in the United States. Look at the cities and towns where seminaries of learning are located and liberally sustained, and then at those where they are not, and who is so blind as not to observe the contrast in many of the most striking traits of human character? The people may enjoy equal natural advantages,—may be descended from the same ancestry,—be engaged in similar pursuits, and be equally prosperous;—and yet with all these equalities, there is still a manifest diversity of general character. Of the accuracy of these views we need go no farther for proof than to the vicinity in which we now are, and call no other witnesses than the members of a virtuous and intelligent community, who crowd this hall on this interesting occasion.

But, independent of history and our own observation, the beneficial influence of literary and scientific institutions can be discerned by considerations based upon their constitution, their objects, and the means by which those objects are attained.

It is universally admitted that united action and concentrated effort can accomplish what isolated exertion could never achieve. It is so in political, in commercial, and benevolent operations. It is so in the tented field, and it is so in the peaceful cultivation of letters and the arts. In the study of language the advantages of associated labors are not so appa-

rent nor so great. But even here they are not to be disregarded. There are languages whose beauty and cadence can be seen and relished only by their habitual use. All languages were formed to be spoken; and no person can acquire an adequate knowledge of them from a mere acquaintance with their printed representations. If he cannot speak them as they have been spoken, he must speak *of* them as they should be spoken. He must commune habitually with others who are either masters of them, or, who are, with himself, seeking their acquirement. Hence we find that a foreign language is generally unattainable, or, if attained to any degree, is barbarously spoken and but half understood, by those who presume to be able to trace its intricacies and attune their ears to its melody, alone and unaided.

The acquisition and advancement of science, especially of its useful and certain branches, constitutes the grand field upon which to display the importance of incorporated seminaries of learning. It is impossible to acquire an adequate knowledge of chemistry, geology, and the whole connected range of natural sciences, without specimens and the means of analyzing and combining the various substances of which they treat, and to understand which and be able to apply their multiform uses, are their grand objects. How little was known of these branches of science before they were cultivated in the various scientific institutions of modern times! For want of their aids the knowledge of the heavens sought by the shepherd astronomers of Chaldea resulted only in the confused wonders of astrology. Of the earth, its movements and its internal treasures, the knowledge gained by the Egyptians and Grecians was so limited and uncertain, as to be almost useless. Destitute of the philosophic tests and scientific furniture which colleges and universities provide, they could not follow the easy road of facts and experiments, and were obliged to expend their energies in the labyrinths of conjecture. With a few simple exceptions, their labors were little else than "a childish waste of philosophic pains," lavished in dogmatical dissertations upon essences, categories and universals, and all that nameless batch of absurdities, which composed what was called philosophy, prior to the era of Lord Bacon. In the middle ages, the few who made scientific pretensions, possessed of some vague notions of what they called the four elements of nature—fire, air, earth and water—engendered the crudest and most indigestible monsters imaginable. They bewildered their reason in a restless search after the philosopher's stone and an universal solvent, and benefited the world less than if their unintelligible fictions had never been conceived. Upon a general review of the whole train of discoveries and inventions, which now encircles the wide field of nature—navigates every ocean and river and narrow inlet of human pursuit—traverses the heavens and plunges into the depths of the earth, climbs every mountain and scales every barrier,—the conviction flashes from every stroke of mental power, that without concentrated effort, without libraries—chemical laboratories—philosophical apparatus, and the entire furniture of a modern university or college, furniture which no one man, or mere voluntary association of men, will provide—it is impossible either to advance science, or, to communicate an adequate and correct knowledge of its past discoveries.

From these views the transition is easy to a consideration of the influence of which we speak in preparing the mind for healthful and productive exertion. Mankind, in avoiding the difficulties of ignorance, are prone to run upon the dangers of hastily formed and ill digested notions of things and

their relations. It is impossible to escape these dangers unless the knowledge we gain is the product of patient investigation. The human mind is so constituted that all its works of greatness and value require long continued labor. The ore of knowledge must be quarried—culled out from the clay and stones in which it was embedded—melted—refined—hammered—tempered—polished—and sharpened, before it is fitted for use. All this we must do ourselves if we wish to obtain thorough and substantial knowledge. We must seek to understand the whole subject. We must not only by frequent coastings trace all the sinuosities of the shore, but we must venture out upon and traverse the ocean. The mind wants that self confidence—that consciousness of certainty, which renders its attainments available and safe, if it rely upon the charts and narratives of others.

The grand secret of success in mental labor, in all its varied departments, consists in those systematic, well directed exertions, which under the guidance of definitions and general principles, are formed and pursued in an academic course. They furnish a key which unlocks the mysteries of matter and of mind. They light up and trim the lamp of reason, with which the mind is enabled safely and successfully to explore the recesses of nature, and bring forth “treasures both new and old.” The rules of science, or more properly, science itself, consists of definitions and general principles. To acquire these is the work, not of a day, nor of a year—they are the labor of years. And when acquired they serve as guides in arranging and classifying all the numerous and apparently heterogeneous forms of being which are strewn around us, and amidst which the untaught mind wanders as in “a mighty maze without a plan.”

As it is with the body, so with the mind. In order to derive nourishment from the food of which they partake it must undergo a preparation for organic action. Too much must not be taken at once, and there must be something of order in the dishes. The desert must not precede the bread and beef. If these precautions be omitted, the inevitable result is a *mental dyspepsia*, tumors and fevers and phrenzies of the mind, which defile and destroy its powers, and render them a bewildering mass of ruins. For all these disorders the antidote is in the generally well graduated course of study in all our Colleges and other schools of science. Here the mind is made to undergo a process which develops and strengthens all its powers in their proper proportions; and thus fits it, as well for preserving unimpaired the treasures which it has already amassed, as for extending its march into new fields of discovery and of dominion.

The studies and discipline which pertain to a collegiate course, take such deep root in the mind's constitution, that, by no after effort or neglect, can they be wholly eradicated. They impart an energy and decision of character—an independence in thought and fearlessness in action, which if they do not elevate their possessor and sustain him on the heights of honorable ambition, will give to him an impetuosity and hardihood in his downward career to degradation and ruin. We have all been pained to behold and converse with educated men, over whose souls unbridled passion ruled with desolating sway,—who had drunk to the very dregs of the Circean cup of vicious indulgence,—who had become wretched and brutalized, herding with the vilest and most degraded of the human race;—and yet, through all the filth and rubbish, which made them a loathing to themselves and to society, we could discover the indelible traces of their former mental culture. In the deepest, darkest cavern, the diamond is detected by its radiant bright-

ness. So the cultivated mind is betrayed, even by the excess of ruin which marred its greatness and its beauty.

“ ————— As when Heaven’s fire
 “ Hath scathed the forest oak, or mountain pine,
 “ With singed top its stately growth, though bare,
 “ Stands on the blasted heath. ————— ”

The influence of literary institutions upon the *literary taste* of the community, is both salutary and necessary. This age has been styled the true Athenian age;—not the age of that “high and palmy state” of literature at Athens, which poets laud and the literary historian records, but that age of extravagance and curiosity which was at its zenith when “Paul stood in the midst of Mars’ Hill.” It is true that this is an age of reading and thought,—of general illumination, as well as general excitement. But the unprecedented facilities for printing and reading have had, together with their beneficial, many pernicious consequences. It is greatly to be feared, that what the stream of knowledge has gained in breadth it has lost in depth. The good old solid bullion of literature which was current in past centuries, has become too massive for the effeminacy of the present race of literary devotees. Accordingly it has been beaten out into the thin foil with which the tumid nonsense and enervating fictions of the day are gilded. The giants of wit and sentiment of past ages are crowded aside by the countless throngs of pigmies, which infest all our coasts, like the Egyptian plague of frogs, engendered out of the very scum and sediment of literature. It is ever so when true greatness and sterling worth sink in the general esteem. “The fall and decay of a great oak gives birth to a whole tribe of fungi.” I would not be understood as condemning, *en masse*, the literary productions of the present age. Far from it. There are many of them which will live long and deservedly. But these are not the books which the fashionable part of the reading world rank among the classics of modern literature. That meed of distinction is bestowed almost exclusively upon those abortions which teem from our groaning presses, which are

“ Begotten without thought, born without pains;
 “ The ropy drivel of rheumatic brains.”

If a man goes into a fashionable book-store in this reading age, and asks for the Spectator or Robertson, or Cowper or Locke, or the Vicar of Wakefield, he is gazed at with a sneer, as at some straggling hanger-on upon the outskirts of refinement—as one altogether behind the “spirit of the age.” And the wonder-imparting inquirer is fortunate if he is not told that the work for which he asks is “out of print!” He will immediately be handed, as far more elegant works, Moore’s Loves of the Angels, the Journal of Frances Ann Butler, Bulwer’s new novel, the Whim Whams of Launcelot Longstaff, Romance and Reality, or some other of those well-named ephemera of the press, of nearly all of which it may be said—“vox et præterea nihil.” There is abroad an insatiable rage for something new and exciting, and which can be read without much labor. To appease this rage, hundreds of pandering aspirants swarm around the “sacred mount.” Every straggling flower upon the Parnassian steep is withered by their steamy

breath; and the waters of Helicon are well nigh exhausted to preserve in them even the semblance of freshness and odour.

To counteract this tendency to corruption in the general taste the salt of academic lore is indispensable. It is within the province of literary institutions to exert a conservative—a renovating influence over the writing world and over the reading world. The studies which they are designed to cultivate, and the mental and moral discipline which they impart, have a tendency, which cannot be too much promoted, to maintain the rights and preserve the dignity of the fathers of literary excellence. They constitute an integral and a very important power in the republic of letters; and, unless they exercise their *veto* upon the wanton innovations of the age, it must become still more corrupt, and the beauties of Homer and Milton, and the placid depth of Cicero and Addison, cease to be relished and appreciated. Unless a rescue is effected by their arm there is no hope of deliverance. The 19th century will run as wild after the meteors of fancy, exhaled from the marshes of fashionable literature, as did the dark ages after those monstrous excrescences of chivalry which composed the devoted library of Don Quixote.

Such are some of the direct and manifest advantages to society of literary and scientific institutions. They are of general application, taking hold upon the happiness and destinies of mankind under every form of government, in every age, and under every combination of circumstances.

But it may be well to notice the peculiar benefits which seminaries of learning confer upon a free people. European writers upon government generally award to republics the attribute of public virtue, but deny their efficiency and stability. They do not mean, however, by a republic, a government of co-ordinate powers and well-adjusted relations, such as ours. But viewing them as governments under the immediate control of the people, if they merit the attribute of public virtue, they are supposed to be controlled by minds capable of discerning the general good, and sufficiently under the guidance of virtuous principles to have a single eye to its attainment. Men, in their conduct, are governed either by passion and prejudice, or by reason and justice. And such is the constitution of our souls, that unless our intellectual powers are cultivated and fortified by virtue, our passions will, by spontaneous growth, overtop our reason and rule with undivided sway.

Republican government is but self-government in its most extended application. Every freeman is, to a great extent, his own ruler. And if he is not under the influence of reason—of enlightened reason, his freedom degenerates into licentiousness, and produces all the calamities of the wildest misrule and anarchy. If passion reigns, the individual, as well as the community, under its power, is ruined. If reason and virtue are dominant they prosper. To subdue and keep down the former, and elevate and sustain the latter, are the grand objects of that education which is to be obtained in our public seminaries of learning. There must be disciplined minds. Without them the affairs of government cannot be conducted successfully. In a monarchy, if two or three men can be found of sufficient comprehension of thought and energy of action to constitute a cabinet, the wheels of government will roll on with ease. But not so in a state where every man is his own prime minister—where every subject is a king. There there must be intelligence in a greater number, and that intelligence must be of no ordinary kind. It must be such as can look before, behind, on either side, above and beneath, and see the hidden tendencies of public acts. If

this be wanting there is a blindness and constant stumbling in the movements of the body politic. It is not contended that all the citizens of a republic should be trained to a knowledge of the classic page or scientific problem; but the greater the number who are, the greater is the strength and the richer the benefits which belong to such governments. Men may be virtuous, and yet unless their virtue be of that masculine kind, which derives its vigor and its defence from intellectual aids, it is easily corrupted. Such virtue and such aids are to be obtained under that salutary influence which schools, colleges, and universities exert.

Literary and scientific institutions have, in every age, and in every country where they have existed, been the asylums of persecuted liberty, and their sons the advocates of equal rights. The doctrines upon which the British crown based its pretensions to absolute supremacy over the American colonies, was first publicly questioned by a student of the University of Harvard, who was afterwards a distinguished leader in our Revolutionary struggle. The revolution of three days in France, which uprooted a dynasty of despotism, was achieved in a signal degree by the skill and valour of the youth of the Polytechnic school of Paris. And the late salutary reform in the "fast-anchored Isle" found its most unyielding advocates in the plebian alumni of her universities and colleges. Liberal principles everywhere follow with eager step the advance of liberal education; and the firmness of that step is in proportion to the thoroughness of that education. Learned bodies, like Buonaparte at the bridge of Lodi, constantly keep the standard of moral and intellectual conquest in advance, and bid and encourage the world to follow.

The circumstances which in this age of the world have combined to produce a crisis in its affairs have also combined to develop the influence and magnify the value of seminaries of learning. What those circumstances are we are not called upon now to specify. Every intelligent eye, not jaundiced by selfishness, must see that the surface of society is no longer an unruffled calm. Wave chases wave with constantly increasing height and accelerated rapidity. What breath has moved upon the face of the great deep? The breath of heaven. What has given to the crested billows their fury and their strength? It is the moral earthquake which threatens to engulf the cumbrous fabrics of folly and crime. It is a war of elements in which men and gods engage. "Pluto trembles in his dark abodes." And the conflict will not be ended until "fuit Ilia" be written upon the ruins of every turretted hold of ignorance and tyranny.

Launched upon this agitated ocean are the vessels fraught with those treasures of science and Christianity which are destined to illumine and renovate the world. And who can guide them in their adventurous voyage but those to whom Christian virtue, and the learning of Christian lands, have given the undaunted heart and skilful mind. Dangers are to be encountered with which only the well-disciplined mind can grapple. The Cape of Good Hope must be doubled, and the tempests and calms of the equator weathered in safety. Who are equal for these things but they who after patient study have obtained moral and intellectual charts, compasses, and quadrants, drawn from the magazines of universities and colleges?

One of the noblest features in the character of seminaries of learning is the readiness and spirit with which they embark in the varied enterprizes of benevolence, which are the pride and glory of this age. Are arguments and eloquence wanted to convince governments that it is their duty to edu-

cate the poor? They are ready to supply them. Is the hydra, Intemperance, to be slain? They furnish the weapons. Are prisons and the abodes of misery to be explored and lighted up with the smile of virtue, and the demons who reign there to be destroyed? They come with torch and spear to engage in the undertaking, however unpleasant and hazardous. Is the infant mind to be initiated into the paths of knowledge and religion? They send forth the guides. Are the streams of civilization and Christianity to be made flow down the valleys of the Niger and the Ganges? They call forth the resources and furnish the men which are requisite for the mighty achievement. Does the historian or the traveller wish to learn the standard of benevolence among any people? He consults their seminaries of learning, which, like the graduated pillar in the Nile, mark the risings of that mighty river of light and love which is now inundating and fertilizing the world.

It would be improper to close this imperfect review without adverting to the salutary sway of literature and science over the enjoyments and character of those who are the subjects of their dominion. The idea so degrading to the dignity of human nature, and so insulting to the Architect of our intellectual powers, that "ignorance is bliss," however it may accord with the moody musings of the sentimentalist, is spurned by every well-regulated mind. For

"————— What is man,

"If his chief good and market of his time

"Be but to sleep and feed? A beast—no more."

Who that has tasted the richer than Castalian dews, which gem the flowers that bloom along the paths of literary and scientific pursuit, could be tempted to forsake them for the most undisturbed retreat which poetry ever dedicated to ignorance and sense? Who would abandon those paths to grasp at the wealth of Cræsus, or climb to the topmost round of ambition's tottering ladder? The man to whom education has given a relish for the beauties of classic literature nauseates the most mantling bowl of selfish and sensual indulgence. He, to whose expanded mind science unlocks the stores of nature, finds himself the possessor of treasures compared with which the idols of human folly and passion are but bubbles which deceive and—are no more. He feels and enjoys his rank in the scale of creation, acts out his relations to his fellow men, and is impelled by the purest motives to accomplish the high purposes of his existence. He acquires an independence and elevation of character which would make him disdain to "flatter Neptune for his trident, or Jove for his power to thunder." If such a man possess the "*mens conscia recti*," he can meet the most frowning fortunes with a smile of defiance. He moves on through life like the wave of the ocean which rolls its resistless weight to the shore in the brightest day and in the darkest night; and like that shore, he breasts the swelling surge as undismayed in the angry tempest of the tropics as in the calm moonlight of the temperate zone. Cicero has so graphically described the enjoyments to be derived from the studies we have attempted to commend, that, although familiar to you all, I may be allowed to recall his language for your admiration. "*Hæc studia adolescentiam alunt, senectutem oblectant, secundas res ornant, adversis solatium et perfugium præbent; delect-*

tant domi, non impediunt foris, pernoctant nobiscum, perigrinatur, rusticantur." How simple, how expressive, how true.

We look back, my fellow Alumni, through the vista of years which intervene, to the interesting period of our lives which we passed in this nursery of learning, with pleasing or painful emotions, corresponding to the improvement or neglect with which we have treated the advantages we here enjoyed. Have the tender germs of literature and science, which were here implanted, been suffered to perish by neglect, or have they grown, by careful culture, into trees of usefulness, spreading their foliage over those around us, and yielding fruit for the nourishment of the thousands who are perishing for lack of knowledge? Have our collegiate acquirements been made the capital, upon which to accumulate greater intellectual riches; or, have they been thrown away as things unworthy the consideration of manhood? These are questions which require our most unbiassed examination and most impartial answers.

Our presence here, at this interesting season, affords so strong a presumption that our relish for literary and scientific entertainments has not abated, as to exonerate me from the charge of a design to make any invidious imputations. But I speak from experience, as well as from observation, when I say, that young men, especially after engaging in professional pursuits, are inclined to consider their diplomas as full dispensations to subsequent neglect of all those studies, into which their advances have been but over the thresholds. They are prone to forget that "a little learning is a dangerous thing." Such dishonor to their lineage and their literary titles is as criminal as it is shameful. It makes their parchment hang loose upon them, "like a giant's robe upon a dwarfish thief."

It should never be forgotten, that the most exalted stations in society are worthy of admiration only when they are honorably filled. Their occupants must give them their lustre, or they will sink together into obscurity and reproach. The divine, the lawyer, the physician, or the statesman, if he claim the honors of a college, must, on many occasions, be made to feel that they confer but a "barren sceptre," unless they are upheld by the still higher honors of a scholar—a man of general and accurate intelligence. Every professional avocation derives its merit, not merely from a knowledge of its own principles and details, but from an extended knowledge, consisting not of gleanings only, but of reapings, collected from every field which art and science have cultivated. It is a fatal error into which many fall, as well in their preparatory education, as in their subsequent mental culture, that a particular profession justifies the neglect of particular branches of knowledge. That kind of intelligence, which beautifies and sustains any profession, is like an expansive arch—omit or remove any one of the parts which compose it, and the whole is destroyed. When we go out from our offices or studies into promiscuous society, we should not betray our avocations. We should not "smell of the shop." We should be able to sustain with decency, at least, if not with the skill of a studied actor, any part which may be cast for us in the grand drama of life.

However captivating may be the charms of mere literary pursuits, we should not passively sink in their embraces. There is an expanded field of knowledge, in which men and things, as they exist around us, are the subjects of study, which is of the highest importance. We must, with the reading of our offices and studies, mingle the reading and study of the broad book of nature. We must mix with our fellow men—study their in-

terests and their ruling passions. It is necessary we should do this in order to be truly useful and successful in our professional engagements. Do we seek to win the trophies of eloquence? We must intertwine ourselves with all the chords and springs upon which eloquence is designed to play. Do we aim at the confidence and esteem of our fellow men? We must reach it through their interests and their wishes. Do we strive to vanquish their follies and their vices? We must trace their avenues, and reconnoitre their holds. Do we desire fame and immortality? Their monuments must be erected upon the deep and broad foundations of practical knowledge, applied to relieve the wants and enlarge the happiness of mankind.

But these qualifications for usefulness and fame, however important, and even indispensable, are not, of themselves, sufficient. They are but the munitions of intellectual warfare. A man may possess them all, and yet be like a dastard knight, with his eyes tremblingly fixed upon his *cuisse*, or his shield, when they should be guiding his steed and lance through the mazes of the conflict—bewildered and motionless, when he should be blazing in the front of battle. We must study our own strength—learn our own rank, and maintain our own rights. No man ever yet rose to the heights of honorable eminence who did not begin his flight with a confidence in the strength and reach of his own wing. He who would

“Dive into the bottom of the deep, ——

“And drag up drowned Honor by the locks,”

must believe and feel that the nerve and might of his own arm are adequate to the noble daring. This self confidence is the very reverse of that pinionless vanity which is the offspring of mental weakness. It is the basis of that generous emulation—that ambition to excel in deeds of high emprise, which expand and sustain the soul; and which make it disdain to call upon Hercules until every innate energy which it can command has been fully put to the test.

We should also know, and preserve inviolate, our rank and our rights amid the gradations and agitations of society. The discharge of this duty is not unattended with difficulties. We frequently meet with those who look upon educated men as dangerous members of society; and who would, had they the power of Jove, confine them, like the winds of Heaven, in some Æolian cave. And true it is, that learned men may, like the “sightless couriers of the air,” deal desolation around them, unless their force is chastened and checked by the influence of virtue. But such aberrations from their usual and appropriate spheres do not justify that jealousy which too often besets them, and impairs their usefulness. They have a purifying and salutary influence upon terrestrial affairs, which, by its proper exercise, we should teach the world to appreciate. We must not, because we may occasionally have been rudely repulsed when we ventured to step upon the platform of active life, basely abandon our rank and surrender our rights. Although passion and prejudice may sometimes foist the ignoble and unworthy into places which we had marked out for ourselves, we must not therefore retreat like hermits into cells, to show ourselves only at their portals, to count our beads and chant our matins and vespers.

Happily, these instances of injustice to our feelings and motives, and restraints upon our conduct, are few. We should look upon them only as acknowledgments of our influence, and use them as incentives to its exercise,

prudently, but firmly. We have abundant encouragements for laudable effort. The path of duty is plain. And such are the facilities for honorable and beneficent exertion which our admirable institutions, civil, political and religious, afford, that every man may display all his powers and render all his resources effective. Of these facilities it is our duty to avail ourselves. It is an axiom in Christian ethics, which none of us will be disposed to question, that talents involve responsibility: and Sallust has said that "he alone seems worthy to live, and truly in possession of rational enjoyment, who dedicates his talents to some active pursuit." Repose and inactivity are as inconsistent with the obligations as with the merit of men, especially educated men, in this age of action. The important consequences that hang upon the issues of the conflicts between truth and error which now convulse the world, indicate too clearly to be disregarded, that the time has gone by when elegant retirement and learned repose could comport with a meritorious discharge of duty. Cleopatra's barge is not the kind of vessel in which an educated man can now ride with safety and honor upon the current of human affairs. If he attempt it he will be buried—ignominiously buried, in its tempest beaten depths. He who seeks for honor and greatness *now*, must find them amid the rewards of benevolent deeds,—in the results of untiring and untainted action. And admitting it to be true, as Cicero has said, that "*nemo vir unquam magnus fuit sine aliquo afflatu divino*," yet every man whose natural powers have been improved by study, may, with the aids which upright motives and perseverance always bring, attain that greatness which confers true honor, without the brilliant endowments of genius.

" ————— The Earth,
 " Though in comparison of Heaven so small,
 " Nor glittering, may of solid good contain
 " More plenty than the Sun that barren shines."

However imperfectly presented have been these reflections and considerations, I feel assured that they will not be thought inapplicable to our present circumstances, or inappropriate to the objects of our association. And I may be allowed to flatter myself, that if the high purposes they were designed to inspire be carried back with us into our respective stations in society, this visit to our literary parent will not have been without its profits, as it will certainly not be without its pleasures. The character of that parent, exalted though it be, is nevertheless sensitive. It is bound up with the character and honors of her sons,—all of whom she expects will do their duty fully and fearlessly. If we do this, our annual visits to her home, to consult her interests and share her feasts, will afford her as much gratification as they will pride to us, when we read within the wreath which encircles her brow the cheering inscription—" *vivit et viget*."





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with the respects of